

CULTURE AT WORK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
ADVERTISING FOR NEW YORK FASHION WEEK  
AND PARIS FASHION WEEK

by

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This paper examines the use of the Country of Origin Effect and cultural branding in advertising by comparing country-specific cultural features and content from New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week. This study also seeks to identify how cultural differences are portrayed in marketing and how advertisers use this information to influence audiences. The promotional material that was analyzed came from a variety of sources, including social media posts and out-of-home advertising campaigns. This study concludes that though a product's country and culture of origin is often important in its marketing, and that cultural differences between countries are displayed in the global advertising market, the culture of an industry can in some cases supersede the Country of Origin Effect.

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## **Introduction**

Within the fashion community, there are several important events which shape the face of the industry every year: fashion weeks. Of the many fashion weeks that take place annually in cities across the globe, two of the most prominent and influential are New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week. These events (of which there are two per year, in summer and winter) introduce the coming trends in fashion, give designers and fashion houses the opportunity to release their newest lines, and act as a sort of “see and be seen” for the elite in fashion. They also attract visitors, celebrities, designers, and fashion buyers from all over the globe to the cities to take part in these highly publicized events. New York City and Paris are two globalized, international cities with strong influences on the fashion industry. The cultures of the United States and France, however, have significant differences between them that create a divide in how citizens of each country live, how foreigners view each nation, and how the countries are culturally branded.

Culture can also be used as a marketable asset to attract visitors, revenue, and media attention, or even as a way to create a recognizable brand for an entire country. The Country of Origin Effect (COO) is a popular psychological theory which states, “If a particular country is associated with a particular trait, the consumer will be inclined to think that the products, brands or services from that country will, if not share the trait, at least somehow be affected by it” (Andéhn, et al., 2016, p.1). In other words, the COO is the practice by marketers of influencing brands to be associated with certain countries, and lead consumers to make purchasing decisions (either positively or negatively) based on the origin of the product. The COO can act as a powerful tool within advertising. If

people are more inclined to buy a product based on positive connotations associated with a specific country, advertisers will act with this strategy in mind to advance their campaign, using the culture of the country to better market a product or event.

In this paper I seek to identify and better understand the ways in which culture and the Country of Origin Effect are portrayed in advertising in the United States and France by analyzing marketing, advertising, and media coming from and leading up to New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week. I also study whether marketing for a global fashion event hosted in large, international cities has any difference in the ways in which they are mediatized. Further, I argue that within markets such as the fashion industry, the COO is superseded by the importance of a larger culture (in this case, fashion culture), which does not depend on the country of origin of the product or event. This comparative study will begin with an in-depth look at the COO and French and American culture, followed by an analysis of promotional material from both New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, in order to understand the use of the COO within the content.



## **Country of Origin Effect**

Because of the importance of culture and the COO in this paper, as well as how the COO relates to both France and the United States, it is important to understand the intricacies of this theory, as well as to have concrete examples of what exactly the COO entails for each of these two countries.

Returning to the definition of the COO, Mikael Andéhn, et al. (2016) provide valuable insight as to what exactly this psychological theory entails. The authors state that:

The [COO] is generally thought of as a phenomenon that occurs when consumers infer that the characteristics of a country transfers onto a product, a brand or even a service. In other words, if a particular country is associated with, a particular trait, the consumer will be inclined to think that the products, brands or services from that country will, if not share the trait, at least somehow be affected by it. [...] The practical relevance of this phenomenon is not difficult to fathom, as it would indicate that marketers could use the country-of-origin as a pre-packaged quality indicator (Andéhn, et al., 2016, p.1).

Essentially, the reputation and connotations of the country of origin of a product can transfer to a product and cause consumers to be more (or in some cases less) likely to purchase a product or service.

In 2018, a study was conducted by Juan Manuel Birbel-Pineda et al. (2018), which sought to understand the importance of the country of origin of products in several international markets. After collecting statistical data from different trials with a variety of products, the study concluded that there was a strong positive correlation between the country of origin and the likelihood of the consumer to purchase the product due to positive connotations associated with the country. This trial was one of

many that had the same conclusion: the COO undoubtedly affects purchasing habits (Birbel-Pineda, et al., 2018, p.9).

There are different reasons for which the COO has the impact it does. For some products coming from certain countries, for example, cars coming from Germany, certain aspects such as reliability and engineering lend themselves to a positive reputation (Henley, 2018). Other aspects such as tradition, elegance, luxury, and ingenuity can also be traits associated with countries, leading consumers to be more inclined to purchase products from that country based upon the association. In France, there is a long history of tradition in the kitchen and French cooking skills, which serves as an example of tradition being used via the COO. Knowing the key reasons why certain products are associated with different countries is important in understanding the COO, as well as understanding how culture plays a role.

For France, the impact of the COO has been cultivated through years of media representations of culture, advertising initiatives, and concentrated efforts by the French government to present France in a recognizable and well-defined way. The country has been able to use the COO to market itself and its products effectively and profitably. One of the most important factors in France's ability to utilize beneficially the COO is the use of cultural identity markers which help cultivate the desired image and boost the way French products are seen in marketplaces, both internationally and domestically. This has led to France's reputation for certain products, like cuisine, luxury goods, makeup, and perfume. There has also been a sense of romanticism, style, and glamour surrounding France that is recognized the world over. Paris, in particular, is often represented in film and television as a dreamy, romantic, and idyllic city, leading it to

be one of the most visited cities on the planet. Iconic monuments such as the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe are some of the most widely recognizable images. The COO is in full effect in France, and the French use this to their advantage. A common example of the COO at work is the luxury goods industry. Handbags and *haute couture* fashion brands such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Dior which hail from France associate the country with the reputation of the brands themselves: chic, classy, and luxurious. With French products typically associated with tradition, romance, and all things luxe, these positive connotations of the origin of the product itself help lead the consumer to confidence in their purchase.

When it comes to the United States, the COO is also recognizable within domestic and international economies, but in a very different way than France. Products that are positively associated with the United States include cars (Chevrolet, Ford, etc.), electronics and technology (Apple, Microsoft, etc.), and certain fashion and textile brands (Nike, Levi's, etc.) (Aichner, 2013, p. 86). There is undoubtedly a certain level of patriotism that comes with buying products with the "Made in" label of one's own home, and that is something that we see touted in the United States, as well as in France, where nearly all products are labeled "Made in France," from ground beef to cars to notebooks. In some countries, including the United States, all imported products are required to list the country where the product was made, and it is even a legal obligation to note if the product was made domestically or internationally (Aichner, 2013, p. 85; Flexport, n.d.). While France's COO image has been built up over a long period of time and the country is viewed in a certain way that reinforces the COO, it is different in the United States. The cultural traditions which have long existed in other

countries have yet to be fully established in a way that is able to impact the COO in the same way in the United States. The United States has more COO influenced products that are technologically focused. For example, according to a study by the National Science Foundation, the United States leads in technology advancements when compared to any other country (National Science Foundation, 2018). Though the United States has only been a nation for two and a half centuries, companies like Apple, Microsoft, and Intel, as well as all of the contributions to the field that have been made in Silicon Valley, California, have solidified the United States as the top contributor to the tech industry. Being the world leader of technology has allowed the United States to have a positive COO relationship with tech products, as opposed to France, which has different and more established traditions than the United States.

## **The Iceberg Effect and Culture**

The Iceberg Effect states that the structure of culture resembles that of an iceberg; there is the small part we see above the water, but the entirety of the iceberg is far larger and hidden beneath the surface (Hanley, n.d., p. 1). On the top we see the obvious things: languages, clothing, cuisine, et cetera. What we do not see, however, are the more nuanced aspects of culture where some of the most distinguishing differences are found, such as family values, self-concept, and biases. Though some cultures may look similar on the surface level, there are bound to be differences that distinguish one from another- differences that create each country's unique cultural identity.

The United States and France, though both powerful, globalized nations with cultures which bear many similarities, have differing cultures when it comes to deeper cultural levels and identities. In their book *Au Contraire! Figuring Out the French* authors Gilles Asselin and Ruth Mastron (2001) dive deep into the complexities of American and French culture and compare them to each other in a way that highlights profound differences, from interpersonal relationships to business practices to the way history has played a role in shaping each culture (Asselin & Mastron, 2001). Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the differences in culture and show how Americans and French handle the same situation in different ways due to culture, especially when it comes to more subtle cultural differences like identity. One example that the authors explain in the text is the cultural differences involved in friendships. The authors state:

Americans ‘play it by ear’ with their friends and take friendships as they come. Most American friendships begin with some kind of physical proximity, often involving a shared activity. [...] The French, with their passion for classification, have very clear boundaries for their relationships with specific people in specific situations. For example, French neighbors are not automatically counted as friends or even as acquaintances (Asselin & Mastron, 2001, p. 81).

Another example used by the authors which accurately and clearly points out these cultural differences is their comparison of a peach and a coconut, saying:

We often use the metaphor of a coconut and a peach to contrast French and American personalities. The coconut has a tough and not very appealing shell that contains pleasant meat and liquid within. The peach, on the other hand, is soft and inviting but has a hard core that is difficult or impossible to get into (Asseline & Mastron, 2001, p. 55).

Essentially, the French “coconut” can be hard to crack on the surface, carrying themselves with self-restraint and boundaries and saving personal information to be revealed once a certain level of intimacy has been reached. The American “peach” on the other hand is softer on the surface and may open up more easily, however the true core of who they are is more difficult to understand. This comparison is strong because it encompasses many different facets of how French and Americans perceive and comport themselves differently in life, largely due to the cultural landscape in which they were brought up.

Because of the complexity of culture, differing not only from country to country, but even from region to region (i.e. Los Angeles versus New York, Paris versus Marseille), advertising is never able to communicate properly all of the intricate facets of culture, yet advertising relies heavily on culture. Advertising seeks out the larger truths and commonalities that bring people together within a given culture.

## **American Versus French Culture**

Some people say that the United States has no culture of its own, or at least no culture that is comparable to what we see in other countries, however many researchers and scholars disagree. Suzana Carmen Cismas defines the key traits of American culture as being the idea of the “melting pot”, a sense of originality and individuality, visual arts, music, and entertainment, consumerism, and democracy, among several others (Cismas, 2010, p. 389-391). Claude S. Fischer (2008) spoke on American individuality saying, “we Americans hold individuals personally responsible for their crimes and do not exact revenge on their kin; we frown on nepotism; we find suicide attacks unfathomable. Such a culture describes the individual ‘self’ as unique and asocial” (p. 346). Fischer also brings in data, noting:

Cross-national polling suggests that Americans are likelier than other Westerners to understand the world in terms of independent, self-reliant individuals. For example, circa 2000, the World Values Survey (WVS) asked respondents in many nations to estimate from 1, none at all, to 10, a great deal, “how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out” (Q. A173). Americans were far likelier, at 44%, to rate their freedom and control at 9 or 10 on the scale than were residents of any of 10 other large, industrial, Western democracies (Fischer, 2008, p. 247).

Though these cultural traits are rather broad, and individuality and independence can be difficult to properly represent, they can still be effectively portrayed in media in a way that is unifying and recognizable as American. For example, many ads today, especially television ads, ranging from car companies to fast food restaurants and every industry in between make mention of American values including hard work and the idea of the elusive “American Dream.” Similarly, a common trope, especially in recent years as an

emphasis has been placed on diversity and inclusion, is that of the “melting pot.” In 2014, Coca Cola released an advertisement during the Super Bowl called “It’s Beautiful,” which featured the song “America the Beautiful” sung in several different languages by a diverse group of individuals (Weiss, 2014). Though advertisements like this can sometimes be viewed as controversial, they nonetheless highlight one of the most important aspects of American culture.

French culture, on the other hand, tends to have more definition, despite the fact that it is facing an identity crisis as the country becomes more diverse. The French government includes a Ministry of Culture which defines and oversees all of France’s cultural endeavors, a centralized cultural agent which the United States does not have. The Ministry of Culture in France, which has existed since 1959, works to support, protect, and promote the country's museums and historical monuments, as well as to protect French cultural traditions (Gouvernement Français, n.d.). There has also been research which pinpoints and identifies what makes up French culture. In a study by Jean-Francois Caron, which recorded over 17,000 comments from French nationals about what it means to be French (in order to better understand culture and identity), researchers found that perhaps the most common element was the French values that are shared by citizen and government alike: “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” (Caron, 2013). These three values, which translate to “Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood,” are central to French culture and how the French view themselves and their compatriots. French culture, according to Asseline and Mastron, is also marked by factors such as the importance of education, a sense of individualism that negates the “other,” the importance of privacy, and a sense of sensuality and aesthetic that is palpable (Asseline



& Mastron, 2001, p.44, 71, 81). Other cultural elements that are important in France are fine arts, cinema, and fashion, much of which is based on longstanding traditions of the country, according to Encyclopaedia Britannica (Woloch, et. al, 2020).

It is important to understand the cultural differences that could be used in promotion for events such as New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week. When we compare domestic and international markets in advertising, we can see differences between the ways things are portrayed within the different markets. A French company advertising in the United States is going to play up the so-called “Frenchiness” (a term that has been adopted by the French) through the use of cultural stereotypes, true or not, to entice the consumer. Some common tropes that are widespread in media regarding the French include people wearing horizontal stripes and berets, eating escargot and baguettes, drinking wine and smoking cigarettes, being seductive and sensual, and having an air of hauteur and pomposity about them. On the other hand, domestic advertising campaigns are likely to use uniting truths rooted in culture as a way to appeal to the intended audience. For example, a French beer company called 1664 ran an advertising campaign which was designed to highlight the nonchalant coolness, which is a common (yet truthful) cliché in French culture. Instead of running a campaign that told the consumer that their beer was the best in the world, 1664 opted for a campaign that simply said, “Pas Mal. Expression Française Synonyme de Qualité” (translated to English, “Not Bad. French Expression Synonymous with Quality”). This phrase is a very typical French saying which has a certain level of significance and humor, working effectively to use the COO and a widespread cultural link in the marketing of this product to a domestic audience.



Figure 1: “Pas Mal” advertising campaign for 1664 beer in Paris which highlights a specific aspect of French culture and markets it to a domestic audience.

Language plays, perhaps, the most significant role in French culture and identity. In fact, the 1994 “*Loi de Toubon*”<sup>1</sup> by former Minister of Culture Jaques Toubon states that all advertisements in English must be translated into French. A quota mandates that 35% of songs on the radio and programs on the television must be in French, in order to protect the language from anglicism (Ministère de la Culture, n.d.). Another institution, whose entire goal is to protect the French language, is L’Académie Française. L’Académie Française<sup>2</sup> is a government organization which is made up of 40 members, *Les Immortels*<sup>3</sup>, who act as the authority on the French language and its

<sup>1</sup> In English, Toubon Law.

<sup>2</sup> In English, French Academy.

<sup>3</sup> In English, The Immortals.

grammar, publish a dictionary, fight against anglicism, and admit new words officially into the French language (Académie Française, n.d.). According to the website of L'Académie:

“Si la fondation de l'Académie française par Richelieu en 1635 marque une date importante dans l'histoire de la culture française, c'est parce que, pour la première fois, les débats d'une assemblée de lettrés ont été considérés comme pouvant jouer un rôle éminent dans le devenir de la société et de la nation.”

[If the foundation of *L'Académie Française* by Richelieu in 1653 marks an important date in the French culture, it is because, for the first time, the discussions of a group of erudites were considered to be able to play a distinguished role in the future of society and the nation.] (L'Académie Française, n.d.)

The organization itself is aware of the role it plays in French culture, a role it has been playing since the 17th century, and it emphasizes language as one of the most important features of French culture. Though anglicisms in the French language have gained popularity, especially with younger people in recent years, many average French citizens fight against the use of these words and strive to keep the sanctity of the French language intact. As an American who has spent a significant amount of time living in France, immersed in French culture, I have interacted directly with people who believe that the downfall of French culture is partially rooted in the increased use of English within the French language. In fact, one of the hosts that I lived with for two and a half months told me that terms like *le business*, *le marketing*, and *un email* (common anglicisms used in French) were never to be spoken in his presence, and that we must instead always use the proper French versions (*l'entreprise*, *la commercialisation*, and *un courriel*). It came as a surprise to me, as I, 18 years old at the time, had never

associated language with culture in the same way. This was a very clear example that proved the importance of language within French culture.

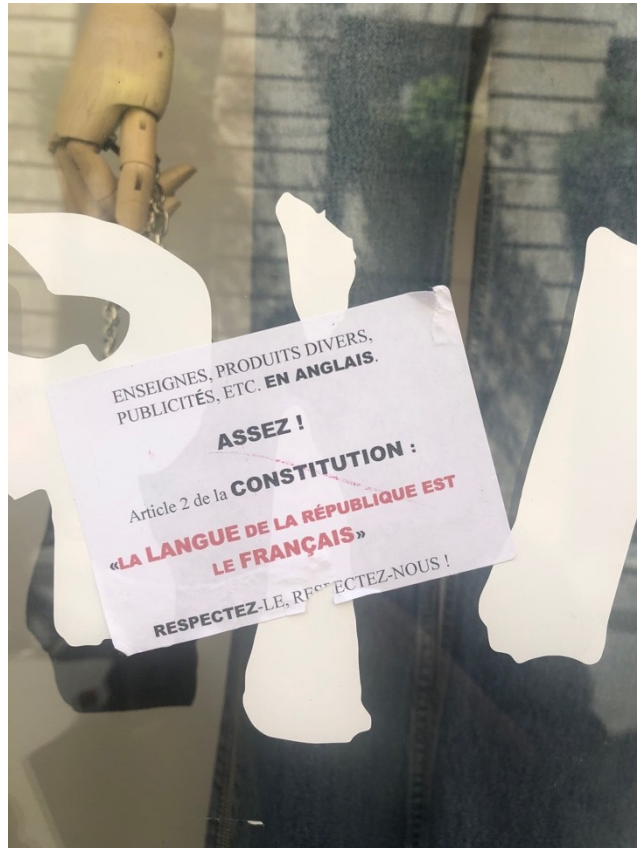


Figure 2: A sticker placed over an advertisement in English reading “Spring Days!” on a street in Paris.

Translated, “Signs, diverse products, advertisements, etc. in English. ENOUGH! Article 2 of the Constitution: ‘The language of The Republic is French.’ Respect it, respect us!”

## Advertising and Culture

Culture and the advertising industry are two entities that go hand in hand. In his book *Advertising as Culture*, Chris Warton (2013) explains the ways that advertising and culture interact with one another. Warton mentions that:

Advertising is culture to the extent that advertisements reflect a way of life; yet culture is itself a form of advertising, promoted and represented in the form of identities, language communities, physical spaces, and textual arrangements. Culture does not require advertising or advertisements. Nonetheless, all social relations are shaped in cultures marked prominently, if not inescapably, by advertisements (Warton, 2013, p. 23).

Warton's explanation that advertisements reflect a cultural way of life is key to understanding the relationship between ad and culture. Another way that this can be explained is by saying that advertisements and the advertising industry hold up a mirror to a culture and reflect it back to itself. The relationship between advertising and culture is quite important, and one in which we tend to see advertising relying more on culture than the inverse, yet culture also uses advertising as a way to examine itself. When cultural movements and shifts begin to take place, we often see that reflected in advertising. For example, in 2019, when the #MeToo movement was changing the conversation around sexual assault and harassment, Gillette released an ad speaking out against toxic masculinity, a key topic of the movement (Benoit, 2019). Advertising like this seeks not only to point out pieces of our culture that are problematic, but also to provide solutions.

When analyzing the intersection of advertising and culture, it is also important to understand the relationship that the two have with the audience, as well as how the

message is changed to be able to properly target an intended audience. Advertising is, at its core, a form of strategic communication. Every advertising campaign is strategically crafted to be targeted toward a specific market audience. Demographic research is important to creating a campaign that properly reaches the target group. Likewise, this includes having an understanding of specific important factors that play into cultures, and adjusting the campaign accordingly.

Though advertising may seem to simply seek to influence consumers to purchase a product, culture runs deep through advertising and must be adapted for relevance when a business or product is advertised in multiple different countries. Elements of style and brand voice may remain in place, a campaign's message or theme may even stay the same, and often cultural branding is used to benefit from the COO, especially in international advertising campaigns. For example, when American beer company Budweiser Beer began sales in France in 2019, they faced the challenge of marketing a beer whose greatest asset is the cultural connotations associated with it. With neighboring countries Belgium and Germany producing objectively higher quality beer than Budweiser, the company decided to play up the American cultural aspects above all in order to sell the product, according to Mounir Bekkouche, co-founder of Balrog Paris<sup>4</sup> and a former account manager at 84.Paris and TBWA Paris<sup>5</sup>, who worked closely with the Budweiser France campaign rollout (Mounir Bekkouche, personal communication, May 6, 2019). Bekkouche says that diving into the culture and going beyond the product, by making Budweiser's launch in France a cultural event, was the

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<sup>4</sup> Balrog Paris is a "communication lab which leverages pop culture and explores new channels to entertain people and meet them where they are" (Balrog Paris, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> 84.Paris and TBWA Paris are two advertising agencies located in Paris, France. 84.Paris is the agency that released Budweiser's roll-out campaign in France (84.Paris, n.d.) and TBWA is a multinational agency headquartered in New York City whose largest client is Apple Inc.

most important aspect to creating a successful campaign (Mounir Bekkouche, personal communication, May 6, 2019), which led to the agency creating a campaign underlining the “American-ness” of Budweiser. Budweiser, or simply Bud, as it is called in France, advertisements were released summer of 2019 which closely resembled American Budweiser ads.



Figure 3: Example of Budweiser’s advertisements in French which are nearly identical to Budweiser advertisements in the United States (Budweiser, 2019). Note the asterisks after “King of Beers” which leads to a French translation at the bottom of the advertisement.

It is important to note that advertising sometimes relies on what is called “typification.” Typification refers to “the process of relying on general knowledge as a way of constructing ideas about people and the social world” (Crossman, 2017). For

example, what we may see of farmers within advertising may not be the exact truth of what the reality of the situation is. Though some of what is classified as typification is rooted in cultural truths, other pieces of it are generalizations that may not be applicable in every situation. Because of this, there are instances in which we are exposed to generalizations of culture that are not truly reflective of an overall culture.

We see culture reflected in advertising far more often than we are even aware. Sometimes we see grand cultural displays in advertising that are representative of larger movements, or very clear-cut, stereotypical examples of culture which are recognizable and sweepingly representative. However, even when not depicted in this way, subtleties of culture act as a backbone of advertising campaigns.



## **Methodology**

With a clear understanding of the COO and culture, as well as the cultural landscapes of both France and the United States, we can return to the research questions. As stated earlier, I seek to understand how (and if) exactly the COO and use of cultural branding impact advertising efforts for Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week.

In order to have the proper knowledge necessary to identify what cultural differences may be presenting themselves, it was important to acknowledge and emphasize the key background theories, as well as to understand the COO and the important basis of culture in both the United States and France. With an understanding of the impact and use of culture and the COO, the task became to examine how they are manifested in advertising specific to Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week. To do this, a variety of communications, including traditional and non-traditional advertising campaigns (including social media campaigns), were examined to determine if French and American cultural points were used as a way to attract attention to the specific events in a way that differentiated them from each other.

This is where the difficulty of this type of qualitative study comes in, because, without specific data points, it can become difficult to analyze and differentiate cultural nuances in advertising, especially because many are subtle. Hence, the importance is placed more on the similarities between the media coming from Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week than the differences, especially as these events are not organized or promoted by one singular body which leaves room for stylistic and

strategic differences. Along with these similarities, it is also important to seek out overt cultural markers within the communications.

Social media was the main content analyzed for this study. While searching media to analyze, social media was the most prominent and available. There were far fewer examples of out-of-home advertising<sup>6</sup> than initially expected, but the social media presence for both events is very strong. Social media is important to study because it allows the organization to interact directly with its audience. When we analyze social media presence, it is crucial to delve into the content posted by the accounts and to search for cultural clues and context. It is important to note the reasons for which I chose Instagram and Twitter as the social media to analyze. While New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week technically have a presence on channels such as Facebook and Youtube, they are far less organized. The validity of these accounts on these social media outlets was also more difficult to identify, because there are many “vlogs” for these events, as well as fan-made pages that are not official. Because both the Instagram and Twitter accounts are verified, we can be sure that the content accurately represents each organizations’ viewpoints. These channels are also used by people of all ages, have features that promote interactivity between users and organizations, and allow for creative content to be directly distributed to their audiences.

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<sup>6</sup> Out-of-home advertising is defined as any type of advertisements that is found outside of one’s home. This can include posters, billboards, lampposts signs, subway signs, and bus shelter advertisements.

## Findings

### Paris Fashion Week

As stated previously, France is well known for its contributions to fashion, particularly *haute couture*. The country boasts a myriad of high-profile luxury designers and fashion houses, such as Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, and Christian Louboutin, among many others. Though the average French citizen may not outfit themselves in *haute couture* on the daily, there is a general appreciation for high quality apparel, as well as the tradition behind it that has been a key part of French culture for centuries. Because of the importance of fashion within French culture, Paris Fashion Week is an event that creates excitement throughout the entire fashion community, perhaps more than any other Fashion Week.

Paris Fashion Week is organized and hosted by *La Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode*<sup>7</sup>, an institution which, according to its website, has been around since 1973 (Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, n.d.). However, the organization grew from a similar institution created in 1868, and there have been people working in similar positions since the time of Marie Antoinette. The *Fédération* is French fashion's governing body which "seeks to promote French fashion culture," "bolster Paris in its role as worldwide fashion capital," and place industry standards on certain fashion subsets, such as what qualifies as *haute couture* and the level of quality of production in the high fashion community (Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, n.d.). Though this federation is not a governmental organization, it acts as a powerful entity that oversees the entire industry and brings together designers to form

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<sup>7</sup> In English, Federation of Haute Couture and Fashion.

an elite tier of fashion. With fashion being a predominant aspect of French culture, the *Fédération*'s gravitas and rigor as to who is accepted, and the importance placed upon competition, education, and skills serves as a testament to the strength of this facet of French culture. The *Fédération* also acts as a thinktank for the future of the fashion industry and "identifies the potential of brands and offers them strategic landmarks" (Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, n.d.).

Paris's first Fashion Week took place in 1973 (FashionUnited, n.d.). At Paris Fashion Week, which is called *Semaine de la Mode de Paris* in French, there are roughly 75 shows per event, which are split into three different sections: *haute couture*, menswear, and *pret-a-porter*<sup>8</sup> (FashionUnited, n.d.). In Paris, the majority of the shows take place at the Carrousel du Louvre<sup>9</sup> and the Grand Palais<sup>10</sup>, two iconic French monuments; however, recently runways have popped up in new locations around town, including the plaza outside of Les Invalides<sup>11</sup>.

The first analysis of Paris Fashion Week content came from the Instagram account for the event. Paris Fashion Week is on the platform as @ParisFashionWeek. The account has a total of 1,207 posts, 414,000 followers and is following 549 accounts (at the time of publication). Significantly, on the @ParisFashionWeek account all of the posts are in English, other than two stories on a story highlight. It is interesting that an event which takes place in France, which highlights an important aspect of French culture chooses to withhold this important part of culture (the French language) in its social media presence. This may simply reflect the global nature of this event.

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<sup>8</sup> In English, ready to wear fashion.

<sup>9</sup> The Carrousel du Louvre is a shopping mall attached to the Louvre Art Museum in Paris.

<sup>10</sup> The Grand Palais is an exhibition hall and museum directly off of the Champs-Elysees, one of the most iconic shopping streets in the world.

<sup>11</sup> Les Invalids is a French military history monument and museum.

Organizations typically default to English for events of this kind; however, the use of English is undeniably noteworthy.

In terms of content, @ParisFashionWeek tends to post simple photos and videos that seem, in a sense, more traditional. For example, the account for Paris Fashion Week tends to highlight more French designers, such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton. The @ParisFashionWeek account has posted many close-up images of articles of clothing that highlight the textures and patterns. In the style that they are photographed, the outfits on display resemble works of art, as opposed to mere garments. One important piece to the @ParisFashionWeek account is that many of the posts include cultural landmarks within Paris. We see Le Palais de Tokyo<sup>12</sup>, Le Louvre<sup>13</sup>, L'Hôtel de Ville<sup>14</sup>, as well as other buildings important to French culture in posts on the account. There are also scenes of traditional French streets, cafes, and art-deco style signs for the Paris metro. The showing of fashion in conjunction with these culturally significant Parisian markers is an example of the COO at work. The fashion styles photographed in a Parisian street create a certain air of chicness and glamour that has a positive culture-based influence on the audience.

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<sup>12</sup> Le Palais de Tokyo is a modern and contemporary art museum in Paris.

<sup>13</sup> Le Louvre is the world's largest art museum and one of the most well-known monuments in Paris.

<sup>14</sup> L'Hôtel de Ville is Paris's city hall.



Figure 4: A post from the official @ParisFashionWeek Instagram account which shows a model on a typical Parisian street with the Arc de Triomphe located in the background.

This is an example of a social media post capitalizing on the COO of Parisian landmarks (@ParisFashionWeek, March 4, 2017).

The other social media that is important to analyze is Twitter. The Twitter page for the *Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode*, the governing body of Paris Fashion Week, serves as the official Twitter account for the event. The account (@FHCM) has 2,594 tweets, 10,200 followers, and is following 376 (at the time of publication). A sample of 100 tweets pulled from the @FHCM account showed that 63% of posts were original to the account, while the remaining 37% were retweets. Once again, the official page of Paris Fashion Week used primarily English, however there was a mix of English, French, and even several tweets in Italian. There were both

retweets and original tweets by @FHCM in these three languages, with English being the most used, followed by French and Italian. This is perhaps more significant than the use of English on the Instagram page for Paris Fashion Week, because @FHCM encompasses all parts of the *Fédération*, not just the event. The lack of this cultural marker in the social media for Paris Fashion Week and for the *Fédération* suggests that for an event like this, language is superseded by its globality.

As for content on this Twitter account, @FHCM retweets many posts from different fashion brands, magazines, and other governing bodies of fashion. There are a fair number of photos and videos from Paris Fashion Week and other fashion shows in Paris, but they also tweet and retweet information that is relevant to the *Fédération* in general. This Twitter page is one of the main ways that the *Fédération* connects with the fashion community, and that is evident through its interactions with brands and designers. It is surprising that Paris Fashion Week does not have its own separate Twitter page from the *Fédération*, especially seeing as their Instagram accounts are separate. By having the @FHCM page as the account that tweets all information for the event, it creates a stronger tie between the *Fédération* and Paris Fashion Week. Perhaps this is a strategic move done by the *Fédération*, as a way to increase the legitimacy of the event, by having the official governing body of fashion in France be the only source tweeting verified information about it. For someone who is unfamiliar with the *Fédération*, seeing Paris Fashion Week information tweeted out by an account that seems almost to be a sort of governmental agency, may make sense, knowing how important fashion is in French culture.

Before doing a more in-depth exploration into what advertising channels would be used, I assumed that the vast majority of media placements would be focused on social media and experiential due to the nature of the events. Unlike an advertisement for a restaurant or a product, Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week are high-profile, star-studded events, which draw eyes from around the globe, so it makes sense that the advertisements would be suited particularly to this situation. There is no evidence that Paris Fashion Week has used outside agencies beyond the *Fédération* to brand itself through any out-of-home advertising campaigns. In Paris, it is unlikely to come across advertisements for this event on the street. In fact, while living in Paris during Paris Fashion Week in February 2019, I was completely unaware that the event was taking place until I inadvertently passed by a runway show for the brand Chloe while walking to school. There were no fliers, posters, or billboards on the streets of Paris to alert the public of the event. The cultural importance of fashion and the rigor of the *Fédération* may have led to the event being more restricted to the elite in the fashion world, as opposed to the general population roaming the streets.

### **New York Fashion Week**

The structure and organization of New York Fashion Week shows some similarities to that of Paris Fashion Week, yet there are also some major differences. New York Fashion Week is put on by the Council of Fashion Designers of America; however, legally speaking, there are some gray areas as to what ownership this organization truly has over the New York Fashion Week name (CFDA, n.d.). The Council is a non-profit, founded in 1962, which works through partnerships with different organizations to donate money to charities and other philanthropic causes



(CFDA, n.d.). The Council is the official host of New York Fashion Week, setting its calendar dates and organizing the events, but it does not technically own the event. While fashion does play a role in American culture, the relevance of the New York Fashion Week is beginning to shift, with some even calling for its cancellation, especially after designer and Council chairman Tom Ford scheduled shows for his own lines to take place in Los Angeles on the first day of the 2020 New York Fashion Week (Binkley, 2020). One reason for the potential demise of New York Fashion Week is that, “the US lacks the iron fist of France’s fashion system” (Binkley, 2020). In any case, New York Fashion Week still remains one of the “Big Four” fashion weeks, alongside Paris Fashion Week, Milan Fashion Week, and London Fashion Week. While French fashion is known for its tradition and longstanding reputation of quality and luxury, American fashion has a different reputation. Designers and fashion coming from America, especially in recent years, have a reputation for being more edgy, experimental, and playing with the idea of streetwear within high fashion. There are traditional style elements and designers who stick with tradition, but American fashion can be markedly different from what we see in France.

The first fashion week ever took place in New York City in 1943. New York Fashion Week brings over 230,000 visitors to New York City over the course of the week, and there are nearly 300 fashion shows which take place (FashionUnited, n.d.). New York Fashion Week’s numerous runway events occur all over Manhattan. The event proves itself to be an extremely economically beneficial event for the city, bringing in nearly 1 billion dollars in revenue annually (FashionUnited, n.d.)

On Instagram, New York Fashion Week simply goes by @NYFW. @NYFW has posted 2,442 posts, has 736,000 followers, and follows 770 accounts (at the time of publication). The account for New York Fashion Week has roughly double the posts as the account for Paris Fashion Week, as well as nearly double the followers. The account for New York Fashion Week posts more up and coming, “edgy” designers, sometimes American, other times not. On this account we see not only runway pictures and images of models in the streets of New York City, but also posts which serve as fashion inspiration, including celebrity looks from events such as the Golden Globes. On this account, we see a high number of posts which include famous people who are household names, possibly due to the fact the number of posts on the account.

A significant point regarding the Instagram presence of New York Fashion Week is that @NYFW posts content which is interactive with its followers. In February 2020, prior to the events of New York Fashion Week, the account posted “NYFW Superlatives,” a series which aimed to “highlight the many personalities you can find front-row at #NYFW” (NYFW, February 6, 2020). The account also has a story highlight on their account called #AskNYFW, which promotes and showcases Instagram live videos, in which users can log on and directly ask questions to the video host in real time. Another series presented on the account is called #OverheardAtNYFW. “Overheard” hashtags and pages, which post conversations which were overheard in crowds at events, are nothing new, and some pages, like @OverheardLA, have gained over 1.5 million followers. @NYFW decided to turn this into a series, with posts saying, “They named their baby after Bella Hadid #OverheardAtNYFW” (NYFW, February 6, 2020) and “It’s too warm for statement

outerwear, it's too wet for leather. I'm just really lost #OverheardAtNYFW” (NYFW, February 9, 2020). Posts like these add a level of interactivity and humor that doesn't exist on the @ParisFashionWeek page. This is a less traditional style of post for this type of account. Content like this provides a different viewpoint on the event. Through these posts, as well as others on the page, we get the sense that New York Fashion Week, an American event, is, to a degree, less serious than its French counterpart.



Figure 5: An example of a post which highlights the interactivity of the posts found on the @NYFW Instagram account (@NYFW, February 13, 2020).

On Twitter, the official account of New York Fashion Week is @NYFW, which has 3,240 tweets, 486,600 followers, and is following 141 (at the time of publication). In a sample of 100 tweets pulled from the @NYFW account, 100% of the content was

original to the account. All of the sampled tweets were images of either models on a runway, an editorial photoshoot, or a portrait session. All of the content which is posted on this account is directly relevant to New York Fashion Week, be it by posting images from the event, the promotion of an event held by a designer who also shows at New York Fashion Week, or models who are frequently in the shows at the event. A large portion of their tweets also contain #NYFW, which also increases interactivity with users on the site.

While the likelihood of encountering advertisements for these events on the street in either of these cities is rather low, there were, nonetheless, several examples of traditional out-of-home advertisements present for New York Fashion Week. Mother Design is a brand and design studio with an office in New York City which created a campaign for New York Fashion Week that was essentially a rebrand for the event (Mother Design, n.d.). The rebrand campaign included a revamp of the NYFW website, a mobile application, invitations and press passes, lamppost banners, and different types of out-of-home ads, following a similar style that is in use today on the New York Fashion Week website and social media (Mother Design, n.d.)



Figure 6: Example of a New York Fashion Week lamppost sign in New York City (Mother Design, n.d.).

According to Mother Design, the agency was approached and commissioned by WME-IMG, a holding company which has ownership of IMG Worldwide, a fashion and modeling group tied closely to many participants of New York Fashion Week for the rebrand (Mother Design, n.d.; Endeavor, n.d.). This is significant because of the fact that Mother Design was commissioned not by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, but instead by an entirely separate group.

The use of this advertising campaign for New York Fashion Week might highlight a desire of the event to brand itself in a way which isn't closed off, per se, and is more accessible to the general public, regardless of the fact that they might not be able to attend the event.

One additional example of out-of-home advertising initiatives is electronic posters in New York City, which were put up in vacant storefronts by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, in preparation for New York Fashion Week (Manoff, n.d.). According to Mark Beckham, the vice president of marketing for the Council, they wanted to place these “visuwalls,” as they are called, in different areas around the city, in order to “to celebrate everything that’s going on in New York and retail, including the diversity and creativity” (Manoff, n.d.). Much like the examples of advertisements on the streets of New York City, this marketing initiative aimed to reach a larger audience and cultivate interest in New York Fashion Week.

It is important to note that as the business of fashion changes, so do fashion weeks. For both New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, traditionally the attendees include fashion editors, buyers, designers, and top-tier celebrities. Paris Fashion Week, in particular, typically boasts a star-studded guestlist, boasting more celebrities in attendance than any other fashion week (Petter, 2019). Now, more influencers (usually social media stars who are often not even involved in fashion) are in attendance. The role of fashion buyers is changing, too, as certain brands are adopting a “runway to retail model,” in which consumers can purchase the pieces shown at fashion week directly after the event, in order to “capitalize on the buzz before it fades” (Petter, 2019). This has, in part, helped change the makeup of the audience in attendance at fashion week. Nonetheless, the exclusivity of the events leads to high prices and scarcity of tickets for fashion weeks, specifically the “Big Four.” While it is possible to purchase tickets to certain shows for less popular designers, generally these events are not attended by the public.

## Infographic

One final promotional piece which was published leading up to the most recent fashion week in New York was published by fashion website Stylight. In the style of French author and artist Vahram Muratyan's book *Paris Versus New York*, which juxtaposes the culture of Paris and New York City through the use of bright illustrations, Stylight released a similar infographic based solely around New York Fashion Week versus Paris Fashion Week (Stylight, n.d.).

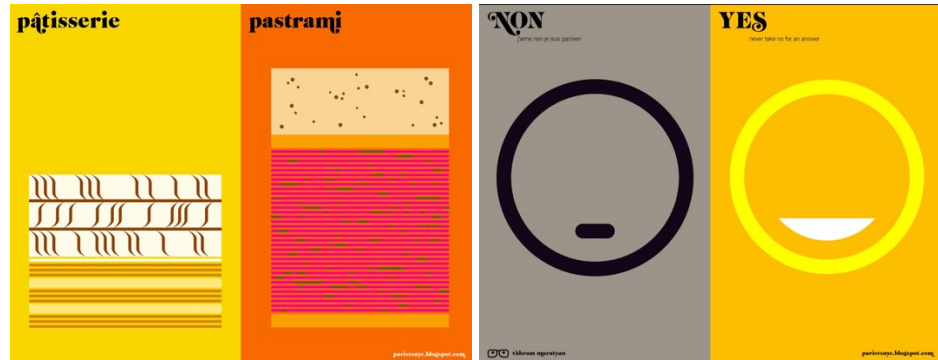


Figure 7: Examples from Vahram Muratyan's book *Paris Versus New York* (2012) that highlight the differences between Paris and New York City (Muratyan, 2012).

The graphic includes thirteen images which show differences between Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week, including “Lunettes (glasses) vs. Sunglasses” and “Pluie (rain) vs. Snow” (Stylight, n.d.). This content, though not originally published by either governing bodies of New York Fashion Week or Paris Fashion Week, highlights perfectly the differences between the two; not only in the day-to-day operations and activities within each of the weeks, but also how they are seen from an outsider's perspective based solely on understanding of each culture. This infographic uses important cultural points to create a certain appeal and intrigue around each of the two fashion weeks, as well as to provide the consumer with what they can expect from each,

based off of the cultural landscape of the cities. This piece of media presents New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week in a way that highlights the country of origin of each event and uses culture to purposefully differentiate between the two. This infographic properly shows how culture manifests itself in these two events (and does so accurately), without infusing a large amount of stereotype or bias. The aspects presented for each of these events builds an idea of what each event is like culture-wise, especially as the points presented highlight facets of culture which are recognizable as French and American in this context. We see the COO come into play here, too, as the components of culture present in this piece may increase the likelihood of the audience to become invested in one of the two events, because of the connotations that go along with the culture. As we see in figure 8, Paris Fashion Week is presented as chic and fashionable, while New York Fashion Week is presented as a sort of edgy, hipster event. The differences between the way that these events are presented is similar to the ways in which French and American culture are often presented.



Figure 8: Examples from Stylight's Paris Fashion Week versus New York Fashion Week infographic (Stylight, n.d.)



## **Discussion**

Through an analysis of social media, out-of-home advertising, and other published media relevant to New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, the understanding of the similarities and differences which are presented leads us to several key takeaways from this study. The first, and perhaps most important, is that New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week are indeed presented differently according to the culture of each country, but the differences are subtle. We don't, for example, find an advertisement or social media post promoting Paris Fashion Week which features the traditional stereotypes associated with France as a way to play up the COO, as we might with other products or events. Instead, subtleties are used to bolster the COO for each of the countries. In France, we saw the importance and rigor of fashion in French culture used as a cultural marker, and in the United States, we saw a more laid back, edgy feeling which is more reminiscent of New York City than of Paris. The subtleties of these cultural differences found within the marketing for these events act to reinforce the COO and the brands, which each of the two countries has created for itself. While more overt cultural differences exist than just the ones that are portrayed in New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week media, we tend to see only the more nuanced aspects. These subtleties may even be so minute that they are undetectable without a background knowledge of French or American culture. Nonetheless, the cultural differences which appear support the COO and its effects in promoting both of these events. On the @NYFW Instagram page we see more interactive, humorous posts, and on the @ParisFashionWeek account there are images of Parisian landmarks and clothing resembling works of art. These distinctions in the content which is posted by

each account reinforces the aspects of culture that differentiate between the two countries and events, but does so in an understandable way. Without analyzing the depths to which culture is present in these accounts, they appear very similar, but, as the Iceberg Effect demonstrates, it is in the nuances of culture that we find its most impactful aspects.

Another takeaway from this analysis deals with the element of language, particularly in the promotion of Paris Fashion Week. Though the French language is a key pillar of French culture, we do not see this exhibited in media and advertising for Paris Fashion Week. English is the primary language used in promotion for this event, which goes against the ideas presented in the *Loi de Toubon*, which was created to preserve the French language. Even on the official Twitter account of the *Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode* we see English as the primary language used. A possible explanation for the lack of French language in the promotion of Paris Fashion Week could be that the use of the event's native language when promoting to a global audience is unnecessary.

It was also interesting to examine the content provided by each of the presenting organizations. The Council of Fashion Designers of America and the *Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode* play two distinct roles in the promotion of the event of each country. With the Council's hazy, confusing ownership (or lack thereof) of New York Fashion Week, their involvement in promotion of the event, beyond setting a schedule, is minimal. The *Fédération*, on the other hand, is the clear owner of Paris Fashion Week, and their promotional presence is evident. It may be that the *Fédération's* watchful eye over Paris Fashion Week and the marketing surrounding the

event, once again, ties back to the importance of fashion in French culture. The fashion industry is aware of the role that the *Fédération* plays in the event and the level of strictness and rigidity which the organization brings. The reputation that this organization and event have are due in part to the COO. Simply put, people know that this event is French and the organization behind it is, too, thus the image surrounding the event is elevated.

Compiling the results of this analysis, it becomes clear that while cultural differences and the use of the COO exist within the advertising and media for New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, the differences displayed are purposefully subtle. The mainstream, apparent clichés surrounding New York City and Paris are not present in the content, and instead we must seek out the differences between them. I propose that the reason for this is due to the nature of these events. Regardless of any cultural connotations that may or may not be associated with the United States and France, there is a third culture which has made itself present: fashion culture. Of course, both the United States and France have their own unique subset of fashion culture, as do all countries, but the cultural makeup of the fashion industry supersedes particular countries' culture when marketing events like Fashion Week. This isn't to say that the influence of French and American culture and the COO isn't important when marketing in the high fashion industry, but it isn't the most important aspect. As we discovered, there is not, for example, advertising for New York Fashion Week that loudly displays all aspects of American culture as a way to attract attention for the event. Likewise, we will not see posts on the official Paris Fashion Week account which show a stereotypical French woman proclaiming the importance and sanctity of the French

language. Cultural components will still be infused into promotion and marketing, but it will be done with subtlety. Instead, the advertising and media will focus on the overarching culture of high fashion, a culture that is marked by the artistry, glamour, and high status which can be found in promotion for both of these events, specifically on social media. New York Fashion Week is not strictly an American event, nor is Paris Fashion Week strictly French. As previously mentioned, both of these cities are highly globalized and international, so while certain aspects of each country's particular culture are bound to be used, as well as to show through in the ways in which the events are promoted, the culture of the fashion industry creates a link between the two events in a unifying way. Because of the importance of fashion culture within the promotion of New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, it can also be inferred that other fashion weeks that take place, for example Milan Fashion Week and London Fashion Week, the remaining two of the "Big Four," follow a similar pattern.

This idea of a larger culture of fashion surrounding the entirety of both of these events is somewhat reminiscent of a study called Global Scan, which surveyed over 50,000 people from 19 countries to "identify consumers, track trends, develop new products, and determine strategic direction" (Leslie, 1995, p. 417). The results of this survey found that "similar groups of consumers can be identified in localized sites throughout the world regardless of national boundaries" (Leslie, 1995, p. 417). The culture of these groups of consumers do not lay claim to one specific territory, but instead occupy a global marketplace in which the COO lacks the importance it has on a nation-based scale. That is to say, those who participate in the culture of fashion are less interested with what country the product comes from and how it is marketed, and

instead rely on the cultural markers within the specific group they find themselves a part of. For example, if an American is entrenched in the culture of fashion alongside their own culture, they are more likely to be influenced by the reputation within the fashion industry than in the product's country of origin, when making fashion purchasing decisions. This different type of culture, which strays from the typical definition and has less to do with country and more to do with the purchasing community, gives us a new perspective as to what constitutes a culture and allows advertisers to explore an entirely new side to the COO.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, I set out to examine how the Country of Origin Effect and cultural differences portray themselves within advertising. By examining two similar events that take place annually in France and the United States, and by having a solid understanding of what constitutes French and American culture, I was able to highlight the differences in culture that are subtly portrayed in the advertising of these two events. In doing so, I also found that in certain cases and for certain events, there may be another culture, which I term fashion culture, and which doesn't belong to any particular country. I also found that though the cultural differences may be nuanced in marketing for New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, they nonetheless demonstrate the portrayal of the COO in global marketing. Studies of this sort help us to understand the strong, yet subtle powers of human cultures and their importance in advertising and the global economy.

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